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THE CIA IN TRANSITION

Casey Enforces 'Reagan Doctrine' With Reinvigorated Covert Action

First in an occasional series

By Patrick E. Tyler and David B. Ottaway
Washington Post Staff Writers

Joao Baptiste, a foot soldier in the Angolan rebel army of Jonas Savimbi, watched in horror one day last August as a Soviet T62 tank broke through the dense bush in eastern Angola, firing at his fellow guerrillas and crushing one of them beneath its clanking treads.

Armed only with an automatic rifle and a grenade, Baptiste scrambled up the side of the tank, yanked the turret lid up and dropped the grenade into the hatch, according to accounts later told and retold in Washington. The explosion stopped the tank's attack on the lightly armed soldiers in Battalion 07 of Savimbi's guerrilla army, which has been fighting the Soviet-armed Marxist regime for a decade.

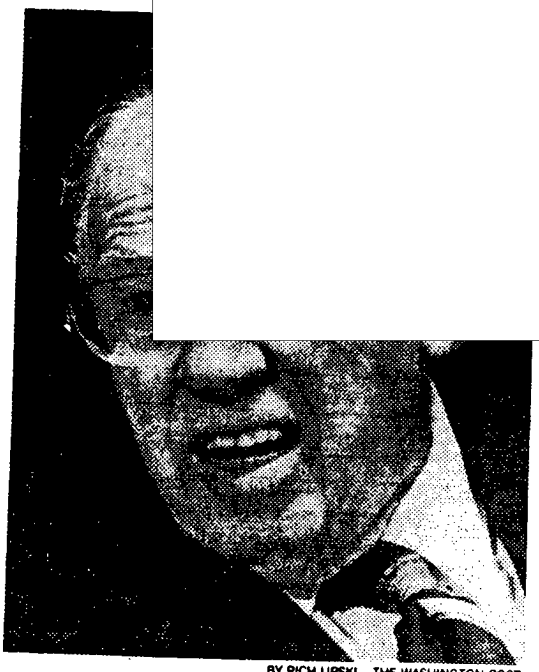
Such tales of heroic "freedom fighters" pitted against vastly superior Soviet weapons—the Rambo archetype in the Angolan bush—have captured the imagination of President Reagan and provided the administration with an emblem for a new direction in U.S. foreign policy that conservatives have begun calling "the Reagan doctrine."

It is a doctrine that seeks to roll back Soviet and Cuban gains in the Third World by supporting anticommunist insurgencies. To translate theory into practice, the administration has turned to a Central Intelligence Agency reinvigorated and greatly expanded under the activist leadership of William J. Casey.

The former international banker and lawyer has unsurpassed stature among senior Cabinet members, making him perhaps the most influential CIA director since Allen W. Dulles in the 1950s in shaping American foreign policy. Casey has used that influence and his own enthusiasm for covert operations to expand CIA paramilitary involvement in Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Cambodia and now Angola.

The resignation last week of CIA Deputy Director John N. McMahon, who reportedly was wary of American entanglements in the Third World, appears to have removed one of the principal brakes in the agency against such growing operations.

Since Reagan took office in 1981, Casey has rebuilt the CIA into a lethal and controversial instrument for carrying out covert operations. The agency's annual budget for secret missions far exceeds $500 million, far higher than at any time since the Vietnam war.



BY RICH LIPSKI—THE WASHINGTON POST

William J. Casey: influential with foreign policy.

The administration's request for $70 million to underwrite the rebels fighting the Sandinista government of Nicaragua would push the sum even higher.

In recent months, the administration has established a secret interagency committee to oversee the increasingly complex patchwork of covert operations. Although formally nameless, the group meets in Room 208 of the Old Executive Office Building and sometimes refers to itself as the "208 Committee." Its members are the micromanagers of America's new secret diplomacy, supervisors of a widening array of local conflicts around the globe where American and Soviet interests collide.

These brush-fire wars—known as low-intensity conflicts in military jargon—have come to dominate Reagan's foreign policy agenda in his second term. Some officials believe that they will be the main battleground of East-West rivalry for years.

Reagan's interagency group resembles in many respects the legendary "40 Committee" established in the Nixon administration to manage an earlier set of secret wars in the 1970s. The 208 Committee meets periodically to determine which weapons will be shipped, which secret warehouse goods used, which middlemen will deliver

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